

April 29, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Michael Johnson
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear President Biden, Speaker Johnson, and Leader Schumer,

We, the undersigned 101 immigrant, refugee, human rights and humanitarian organizations, write to express our alarm and deep disappointment following Congress's decision to reinforce and codify the Biden Administration's suspension of U.S. funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the principal aid provider for millions of Palestinian refugees in Gaza and in the surrounding region. Suspending funding during a humanitarian catastrophe, widespread starvation and looming famine is a moral and strategic failure that abandons nearly two million displaced Palestinians during a period of extreme need. We call on Congress to urgently introduce and pass legislation and for the President to support reinstating funding to UNRWA.

For over six decades, the United States has been one of the strongest supporters of UNRWA, including its largest bilateral donor. Without U.S. support, UNRWA cannot effectively carry out its role as the largest humanitarian agency in the region. Currently, UNRWA is working to provide life-saving assistance to Palestinians in Gaza who are facing extreme malnutrition, starvation, and an outbreak of deadly diseases due to Israel's ongoing bombing campaign and deprivation of aid. To date, [over 34,000 Palestinians have been killed](#) and tens of thousands more injured without access to functioning hospitals or appropriate medical care. The situation in Gaza is extraordinarily dire, and the need to ensure civilian protection and humanitarian relief is crucial.

Cutting off funding to UNRWA completely erodes the international community's ability to respond to one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. International NGOs and other UN organizations have repeatedly stated that they do not have the personnel, resources, or infrastructure to respond to the humanitarian needs in Gaza appropriately. Continuing UNRWA operations is imperative to address and alleviate the ongoing crisis. There is no debate that UNRWA's ability to provide services, including food, water, medical assistance, and protection, is irreplaceable and essential to the survival of Palestinians in Gaza, especially now as famine is imminent.

Furthermore, prohibiting funding to UNRWA not only affects Palestinians in Gaza, but also harms over three million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria who depend on its services for shelter, education, financial assistance, access to healthcare, and more. Palestinian refugees are excluded from receiving any protection or other assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is mandated to provide aid to all other refugees globally. Thus, UNRWA is the primary entity serving this population and has effectively been doing so since its establishment over 75 years ago. UNRWA's unique experience, knowledge, and expertise within the region and with the Palestinian refugee population is indispensable.

Following allegations by Israeli officials that 12 members of UNRWA's staff in Gaza had taken part in the October 7 attack against Israel, 16 countries—including the United States—halted their funding of the critical organization. UNRWA took immediate action in investigating the allegations and removed the accused staff. A newly released report following an independent review for the UN reveals that [Israel has yet to provide any evidence to substantiate the initial claims](#). While investigations continue, Australia, Canada, Japan, the European Commission, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, France, and Germany have all recognized that UNRWA remains the only entity with capacity to ensure safe and effective delivery of aid and services in Gaza on the scale the current situation requires, and have resumed their funding.

UNRWA employees have risked their lives to fulfill their mission of providing aid during Israel's continued bombardment in Gaza. As of April 24, [180 UNRWA staff members have been killed](#) which is “the highest number of aid workers killed in the history of [the] organization in such a short time,” according to the [Director-General of the U.N. office in Geneva](#). Due to the near-impossible circumstances, the Agency has struggled to provide food, medicine, and clean water to the approximately one million displaced Palestinians seeking refuge in or around 154 UNRWA shelters. Now, with the loss of vital funding from the United States, UNRWA's humanitarian aid operations will inevitably collapse, and Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere will continue to suffer grave consequences.

The United States should uphold its commitment to the human rights of the Palestinian people and resume its role as a strong supporter of UNRWA by passing legislation to reinstate funding to the humanitarian agency immediately. Failing to do so would be a moral stain on this Administration and Congress's legacy.

Signed,

18 Million Rising
Acacia Center for Justice
ACCESS of WNY
African Communities Together
Al Otro Lado
Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches USA, Bright Stars of Bethlehem
American Friends Service Committee
American Muslim Bar Association

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Peace Now
Amnesty International USA
Arab American Civic Council
Arab American Institute (AAI)
Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC)
Avaaz
Black Alliance For Just Immigration
Boat People SOS (BPSOS)
Border Butterflies Project
Bridges Faith Initiative
Carolina Peace Center
CASA
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for International Policy
Center for Security, Race and Rights
Center for Victims of Torture
Charity & Security Network
Church World Service
Civic Ark
Climate Refugees
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
CommonDefense.us
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Demand Progress Action
Detention Watch Network
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Disciples Peace Fellowship
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
Engage Action
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Every Campus A Refuge
Faith in Texas
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Hindus for Human Rights
Hope Border Institute
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Immigrant Legal Resources Center

Immigrants Act Now
Immigration Law & Justice Network
Innovation Law Lab
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Islamophobia Studies Center
Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Middle East Democracy Center
Minnesota Peace Project
MoveOn
MPower Change Action Fund
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)
Muslim Justice League
Naser Immigration Law, LLC
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Iranian American Council Action
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Partnership for New Americans
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Oasis Legal Services
Oxfam America
Palestine Legal
Peace Action
People's Action
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness
Project ANAR
Project South
Refugee Congress
Refugees International
ReThinking Foreign Policy
RootsAction.org
South Asian SOAR
Tahirih Justice Center
The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
United Church of Christ
Utah Health & Human Rights
We Are All America (WAAA)
Welcoming America
Win Without War

Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Witness at the Border
Women's Refugee Commission